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The GREAT SACRIFICE

The Tragedy of an Unwanted Bride

COUNT HARCOURT had entered Joan's boudoir unannounced and said that he wished to have a little chat with her. The conversation was about the coming marriage of Joan and Armand Duverne.

"Armand has been so kind to me that I want to make him happy," Joan repeated.

Count Harcount covered her hand with his and leaned over.

"Oh, I suppose you'll make him happy alright, you sweet girl. You could make any man happy. I would be gloriously happy if you — if you gave me just one little kiss."

"No!" Joan shrank away from him.

"You are evidently not pleased with my suggestion," he laughed again. "I admit it was rather in bad taste. But did you ever stop to think that I also might have fallen in love with you? Well. I have. And I am willing to grant you anything — give you anything, if you will be a little nice to me."

When he attempted to draw her toward him, she shoved him back with considerable force.

"Count Harcourt!" she flared up suddenly, "you had no right to come into my boudoir, even though it is in your own house. If you were a gentleman you would not have done it. It was cowardly to come during the absence of your — your wife and Armand. You would not have attempted this impudence had either of them been here."

"You are perfectly right, my dear girl," he responded with a shrug of his shoulders. "I took good care to find you alone. This is an opportunity I could not allow to pass without making the best of it."

Joan looked helplessly about.

Then she sprang up and made a dash for the door.

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But the man intercepted her.

"Let me go — let me go!" she gasped. "If you don't, I'll scream at the top of my voice. The servants will come and find you here. How are you going to explain that to — to your wife?"

His answer to this was typical.

"In the first place, the servants are out. And even if everyone of them were in this house, they would not come to your aid. In the second place, I never explain things like this to my wife. There never was much love between us."

With a violent wrench the girl freed herself and stood against the wall, pale and panting. From the locked door her frightened gaze traveled to the window.

She was growing desperate and Count Harcourt read determination in her eyes.

"I hope you are convinced by this time that you are in my power and you are compelled to listen to me," he began with brutal frankness. "Why not let me be your friend? I could make your life a bed of roses. I am powerful and rich. I'll——"

"No — no, not another word!" Joan broke in wildly.

"Then you refuse to listen to me?" he cried, his face hardening.

"Yes, I refuse. Get out!"

But the man did not leave. He would teach this girl from the Montmartre that he was not to be trifled with. Other women and men, too, had cringed before him in terror.

"Well, if you won't give, I'll take!" he snarled.

He was upon her the next instant. Joan fought him off. When he tried to kiss her, she screamed. This sobered him for a moment. He had lied about the servants being away.

"Hush!" he warned. "That is not going to help you!"

At the next attempt to crush her to him, he received a smart slap across the mouth. It was a stinger.

"I loathe and despise you!" Joan shot at him when he reeled back. "You are not a man. You are the most despicable beast in the world. If I had a gun I'd kill you!"

The Governor of Algeria had met more than his match. But he was fierce in his defeat.

In his towering disappointment and rage he called Joan every foul name ever applied to a woman of the street by a jealous lover.

"Who are you, anyway?" he shouted, "that you dare to aspire to become the wife of an honest man. You haven't even a name. Do you know what I could do with you? As the Governor of Algeria I can have you arrested as a suspicious character. And — by God!" he added profanely—"I'll do it!"

Joan could not recall ever having seen a man so vulgar, so brutal and so common. Every word he uttered filled her with new terror.

"And I'll not stop there!" the villain went on, shaking his fist in her face. "Armand Duverne will go to prison with you. He knows it is against the law to bring a disreputable hussy like you into this country."

This threat seemed to awake the girl from her mental stupor. No harm must come to Armand on her account.

"Please — please don't get him into trouble," she begged. "When he rescued me from those men in the Montmartre, he had no more idea of my past than I have myself. What it was, God only knows. He has been kind to me — oh, so kind. I could not stand having him suffer because of me."

Count Harcourt glared at Joan for fully a minute.

His rage was disappearing. Instead there came into his eyes an expression of diabolical cunning.

"Very well," he said slowly, "I'll not cause Armand's arrest. But he will go unpunished on one condition. You must leave this house to-night. And you must give me your word that you will not see him or my wife again. Stay in your room until one of my servants comes to take you away. I have selected a place where you can stay for the present."

Joan did not have the courage to refuse. For she believed this terrible man. But fear of the future caused her to ask in an awed whisper:

"Where are you going to send me?"

"I shall send you to a lady who is a dear friend of mine," he told her. "What happens to you after that depends entirely upon your conduct. But you have not yet given me your promise that you will accede to my demand.

"You better make up our mind at once. If you don't, I'll have you arrested as an undesirable within the next hour. And remember, Armand goes to jail with you. If he goes to jail because of you, you will be responsible for ruining his life and his career."

"I —I promise," the girl replied, choking back a sob.

"To make sure that you don't break that promise, I am going to lock you in this room," her tormentor said. "I'll make the necessary explanations for your failure to appear at dinner to-night."

Poor Joan's resistance was broken utterly.

She watched Count Harcourt go with distending eyes. Then, as he closed the door and locked it from the outside, she flung herself into a chair and sobbed. All

this had come too sudden and too unexpected.

Her overworked brain could not grasp the full significance of the man's obvious enmity.

In the meantime the Governor of Algeria was on his way to the library. He sat down at his desk and began to write rapidly.

The letter finished, he placed it in an envelope and addressed it. Then he rang the bell. In answer to the summons his secretary bounded into the room.

"Do you want me, Your Excellency?" he asked respectfully.

"Yes, I want you, Ramong," said the Governor none too pleasant. "I have a letter here which I want you to deliver to the address given. This is a confidential mission, and I request that you keep absolute silence. You may rest assured that you will be suitably rewarded."

The secretary bowed and his eyes filled with cunning.

"Your Excellency can trust me always," he said.

"I believe I can, although you have given me cause for doubt on several occasions, Ramong," the master of the house replied. "This is my opportunity to put you to a test. I may as well tell you that this letter is for Mademoiselle Mignon Faraget. You know something about her in an official capacity. Do you not?"

Ramong nodded in the affirmative.

"Yes, Your Excellency. But your secret is safe with me. Shall I deliver your letter at once?"

"At once, Ramong."

The latter bowed again and disappeared. But instead of obeying Count Harcourt's order, he slunk through the long corridor, at the end of which was his room.

On his thin face was the look of a jackal as he

opened the envelope by moistening the flap.

He extracted the letter, read it quickly, then replaced it and resealed the envelope by adding a little more mucilage. An ugly grin lurked about the corners of his mouth.

"For a long time I have wished for a weapon I might use against you, Governor Harcourt," he muttered softly. "I have it now."

Then he slipped out of the room and went upon his errand.

Chapter 65

A DISAPPOINTED LOVER

ARMAND DUVERNE as well as his sister were somewhat disappointed when, upon their return to the Governor's palace, they failed to see Joan's smiling face at the window. Lola, a little disturbed, made a quick trip to her husband's private office. Count Felix Harcourt appeared to be too busy to pay much attention to her.

"I haven't the least idea why Mademoiselle Joan did not come downstairs," he replied very innocently to his wife's inquiry. "Why don't you ask one of the maids?"

Lola did.

She received the information that Joan was soundly asleep and that she had left word that she did not wish to be disturbed because of her continued indisposition, and that she expected to feel quite well in the morning.

Of course, Lola did not know that this maid had been paid to utter a deliberate falsehood. Neither did she suspect that her husband had done the paying.

Her first impulse was to go to Joan's boudoir and see if she could do anything for the girl.

Upon second thought, however, she decided not to intrude. No doubt a good night of unbroken sleep would be the best cure for Joan's attack of nerves.

When Armand was told about this by his sister, he shook his head doubtfully.

"I don't think Joan feels at home here," he de-

clared. "Ever since we came to Tunis she does not seem to be the same girl. In my opinion it would be best to take her back home. And I want to marry her without further delay."

There was a world of longing in the last sentence. Lola walked up to her brother and carressed his cheek.

"You love her very much, don't you, Armand?" she smiled up at him.

"More than my life," he returned, his voice quivering with emotion. "I could not live without her. If she still complains about being ill to-morrow, I'll send for a physician."

"Don't worry about her," Lola soothed. "Joan will surely be alright again in the morning."

That evening the dinner was rather a cheerless affair. Count Felix Harcourt showed no inclination to talk. Occasionally he shot a furtive glance at his wife.

Lola carried on a desultory conversation with her brother. But Armand's mind, under the cloud of keen disappointment, would not respond as it usually did.

Before she retired, Lola tapped lightly on Joan's door.

When she received no invitation to come in, she went to her own bedchamber and prepared to go to sleep.

Armand had no desire to go to bed. Long after Count Harcourt had gone upstairs, he sat in the library smoking.

He could not shake off the feeling of vague dread which had taken possession of him. He was suspicious of his brother-in-law.

Several incidents of the recent past — incidents involving the latter and Joan, came back to him very vividly. He more than suspected that Count Harcourt was infatuated with the girl he loved.

It was a few minutes after eleven when he finally

rose. In the dimly lit corridor he saw two figures lurking.

He recognized them both. One was Ramong, the count's private secretary. The other was the count's personal valet. Obviously these two men had moved apart at Armand's approach.

He passed them with a curt nod and ran up the stairs. The night was one of troubled sleep for the anxious young lover.

When he awoke the next morning the sun shone brightly. He rubbed his eyes, then smiled. And then he understood the reason for his rather sudden awakening.

For he imagined he could still feel the touch of a woman's hand upon his forehead.

"So you came to annoy me in my sleep, you naughty girl," he chided. "Have you no heart. But what is the matter, Lola?" he inquired when he noticed the unusual pallor of her cheeks. "You look haggard."

"Get up at once, Armand," replied the sister. "Dress quickly and come into my boudoir. I must talk to you."

He sat up, staring at her.

"You — you have bad news for me!" he cried. "Tell me now. You have come to tell me that Joan is seriously ill. It it not so?"

Lola shook her head.

"I can't tell you anything now and in here," answered Lola. "Some of the servants are too close. I have a matter of grave importance to discuss with you. Dress quickly and follow me."

As soon as she had left he jumped up and hurried into his clothes.

Upon entering his sister's boudoir, he found her seated on the edge of her bed and in tears. But she

brushed them away with the back of her hand and rose to meet him.

Armand felt instinctively that some calamity had happened.

"Out with it!" he demanded. "What's wrong?"

Lola laid both of her hands upon her brother's shoulders. For a few seconds she gazed fearfully into his face.

"Joan — is gone!" she said.

"Gone?" Armand gripped his sister's hands hard. "Gone? When did she leave and why?"

"I — don't know," Lola responded, the tears coming anew. "When I went to her boudoir this morning she was not there. Her bed had not been touched. On the little table I — I found this. Read it."

Armand took the unsealed envelope and extracted a carefully folded sheet of paper from it. Joan's last message to him read:

"Dear, Dear Armand:

"This is the unhappiest hour of my life, for I am about to say goodby to you forever. I have come to realize that a marriage between us can only cause endless misery. Let me explain. You could not forever hide the hideous fact that you found me in the most notorious resort in the Montmartre.

"It has already become known. I could not stand having your friends and relatives point their fingers in scorn at you. And not without reason. You are generous and big enough to make me your wife in spite of all that.

"But I can not allow you to jeopardize your future happiness for my sake. Dearly as I love

you, I am also capable and strong enough to make a sacrifice.

"I wish I could tell you how deeply grateful I am for all you did for me. And you would do more than that, Armand. You would marry a woman of whose past you know absolutely nothing. What a terrible chance to take for a man in your position and high station in life.

"Try to forget me, dear boy, for believe me, it is best for both of us. My one prayer is that you may be happy as you deserve to be. Goodby and God bless you."

"Joan."

Armand did not cry out nor did he crush the letter in his hand.

For the moment he was utterably incapable of speech or motion. He stood rigid, his features white. His eyes, filled with unspeakable pain, might just as well have been blind, for they stared — stared and saw absolutely nothing.

"Don't stand there like that!" cried Lola, frightened to death. "Speak — say something!"

She followed her brother as he staggered backward and sank into a chair. Then a low, agonized moan broke from his lips. His head dropped and the sheet of paper fluttered from his hand to the floor.

"Get a hold on yourself!" exclaimed his sister, shaking him. "We must take quick action if we want to prevent the worst."

Armand struggled to his feet, and to her horror he burst into a hoarse laugh.

"So I made a fool of myself after all," he cried,

his voice unrecognizable. "My judgment of that girl was all wrong. That damned letter says so plainly enough. Evidently Joan's conscience awoke. And I suppose she regained her memory long enough to tell the truth about herself.

"Yes — yes, she must have. She was afraid to marry for fear I might find out the ugly truth. She was nothing more than an ordinary hussy of the streets. She was——"

"No, she was never that!" Lola broke in. "You are making a mistake, Armand. Joan was a good girl. I am a woman and I know my sex. Since you brought her home she never gave us the least cause to believe that she was an ordinary adventuress. She was clean and sweet. You have said so yourself many times. That is why you fell in love with her."

Armand's attitude changed and the hard expression died in his eyes.

"Yes — yes, you are right, sis," he admitted with a groan. "Joan was clean and sweet. Had she been unworthy I would never have fallen so desperately in love with her. Oh, how I love her even now. But why did she leave me like this?"

"Her letter explains that, dear," Lola said. "And one sentence betrays the fact that a secret enemy of yours has been at work."

Lola's statement caused him to snatch the sheet of paper from the floor. Again and again he read every word with utmost care.

At first his bewildered mind refused to grasp the horrible idea. Joan had given him a clue in the sentence which said:

"You could not forever hide the hideous fact that you found me in the most notorious resort in the Montmartre. It has already become known."

That was it!

Armand had not confided in any living person except his sister and her husband, Count Harcourt.

The latter had insisted upon prying into Joan's past. Lola was incapable of treachery. But her husband was fit for anything where a beautiful young girl was concerned.

"Damn him!" he snarled, his teeth clenched. "I might have expected it. No other man of my acquaintance would stoop so low."

"Whom do you suspect?" Lola wanted to know.

"For your own sake, don't ask me," Armand implored.

"But I must know, brother. You have no idea how dearly I have learned to love Joan. Tell me so the hurrible brute——"

"Suppose this man should prove to be your own husband?" he interrupted.

"My — my husband?"

"Yes."

"But — but it couldn't have been, Armand. I am sure he knew nothing concerning Joan's past."

"There is where you are mistaken," he said, and then he related under what circumstances he had told Count Felix Harcourt how he found Joan and where. "I have my suspicions why the poor girl fled from this house. Your husband is responsible for it," he ended fiercely. "But he shall answer to me. I'll punish him."

"No, not you alone," Lola answered with ominous quietness. "I am going to help you. I too, have a score to settle with him. I hate him."

Armand stared at her, amazed.

"Yes, I hate him," she went on, her voice rising. "I did not know what kind of a man he was until after I married him. Every chorus girl called him her friend.

But that was not the worst. No decent woman, single or married was safe with him alone. He has humiliated me openly and in the presence of others.

"And now he has taken from me the dearest and best friend I ever had. What method he used in driving poor Joan out of this house can well be imagined. This is the end between us. Now let us go to him at once and make him own up to the truth. And after that I'll leave him for good."

Chapter 66

BROKEN CHAINS

COUNT FELIX HARCOURT, the Governor of Algeria, sat in his private office. Before him lay a number of letters still unread. Several documents awaiting his official signature received no attention. Obviously he was in a thoughtful mood and did not feel disposed to allow anything to disturb him this morning.

Even a casual glance at his clean shaven face conveyed the impression that he was well pleased with himself. And he was pleased with the world at large.

And why not? Was he not practically the ruler of one of the finest French colonies?

In that position he had the power — if not the moral right — to deal with men and women as he saw fit. Those who opposed him were removed by various methods.

It was really a pity that a man of his character should be allowed to dominate and shape the destiny of that country and also the destiny of many of the people in it.

He rarely permitted right to prevail over wrong. He had neither a conscience or a heart.

Once the evil within him was aroused, he could be as merciless and cruel as a Nero. Cunning and trickery were his most effective weapons. And he was a past master at covering his tracks.

This morning a cruelly satisfied smile hovered

about the corners of his sensual lips.

Once more his cunning and trickery had won a victory for him. In trying to give expression to the elation he felt, he hummed a few bars from a comic opera to himself.

The humming stopped suddenly when the door opened and his wife came in.

"Good morning, Lola." he greeted pleasantly But the smile quickly faded when he saw her brother in the rear. For a very good reason he had no desire to see Armand Duverne this morning.

"I — I have something to say to you," Lola retorted.

Count Harcourt stared at her for a moment.

"Why, what is the matter, my dear?" he inquired, somewhat alarmed. "You look frightfully pale. Are you ill?"

"No, I am not ill, Felix," she returned.

He grimaced, then said:

"Not ill? Surely something must be seriously wrong then. You are excited and you are trembling."

"You shall know the reason for that presently," Lola answered, stepping up to him. "I have come to demand an explanation. This time lies will not avail you. I want the truth."

Count Harcourt rose slowly from his chair.

"If you and I must quarrel again," he said, his voice not quite under control, "I prefer to do so when we are alone. Will you kindly ask your brother to leave the room?"

"I am going to stay right here," Armand spoke up.

The Governor of Algeria shrugged his shoulders. Although he saw trouble in the offing, he retained his usual composure.

"Very well," he acquiesced. "Now then, Lola, my dear——"

"Don't call me that," she interrupted almost fiercely. "It sounds ridiculous." She paused a second or two, then spit out: "Joan left this house some time during the night. And this is the message she wrote before she disappeared. I want you to read it."

Harcourt took the sheet of paper handed to him. The room was very bright even to the remotest corners. Nevertheless he stepped over to the window. With his back turned, he read.

The fiendish grin which crossed his face was one of absolute satisfaction.

This letter indicated that his plan had succeeded beyond the fondest hopes. In fact Joan had assisted him in covering his tracks. Her stated reason for leaving sounded logical enough.

"Why, I am utterly at a loss how to understand this," he exclaimed as he whirled about and confronted Lola and her brother.

"So are we," Armand said, meeting the count's wavering eyes.

"The poor girl must have been suffering from some sort of mental aberation," the latter suggested. "Of course, we must go after her at once. If she is hiding somewhere in the city, the police will find her. If she left by train, the officials at the station can tell us in which direction she went. Come, Lola and Armand, we can not afford to lose time."

Count Harcourt was playing his part very well, and with apparent success. Armand Duverne was neatly taken in, and his sister looked less suspicious.

Just then a tap at the door caused Lola to turn. It was her faithful maid.

The maid whispered a few words to her mistress.

What they were neither of the two men could understand. But Lola asked to be excused for a few minutes, promising to return.

Armand and his brother-in-law were now alone. They were standing face to face like two gladiators in the ring.

Count Harcourt made the mistake of dropping his eyes. In fact his entire demeanor betrayed that he was ill at ease. The younger man's suspicion flamed up anew.

"I believe you are responsible for Joan's sudden leaving," he accused.

"Why, you are crazy, boy!" the other defended vehemently. "You don't think for a moment that I would ask her to go when she was my guest, do you? And had I found cause to go to that extreme, I would never have done so without first consulting you, my dear Armand. How did you get that absurd idea?"

Armand explained the cause of his suspicion in a few words. The count listened with his face half averted.

"Of course, I admit that I knew about her past," Harcourt said as his brother-in-law finished. "You yourself told me the day you arrived. But you must admit I treated her with utmost respect and courtesy. I never let her suspect that I knew you found her at that notorious resort in the Montmartre."

It was evident that young Duverne was far from satisfied. Something seemed to tell him that Count Harcourt was not adhering strictly to the truth.

"Felix," he said in a low, menacing tone, taking the count by the arm, "you occupy a high position. You are credited with being a man of honor. You are also the highest officer in command of the Algerian army, a soldier. I am a gentleman first, and then a soldier. I am going——"

"Well — well, what?" the Governor interrupted impatiently. "Why all these words? What are you driving at?"

"Just this," the other resumed quietly, "if you swear upon your honor of a soldier and a gentleman that you are innocent of having conspired to drive Joan out of your house, the incident is closed."

Ah, this was easy. Count Felix Harcourt was neither a gentleman and rather a poor excuse for a soldier.

Besides, what mattered a false oath more or less? He had not expected to get off with so little difficulty. He held out his treacherous hand with a smile.

"Armand," he began, "I swear on my honor as——" He stopped, for the door was jerked open and Lola rushed in.

"Don't believe him! Don't believe him!" she cried, stepping between the two men. After having addressed these words to her brother, she faced her husband. "You cowardly liar!" she flamed. "You would swear on your honor, something you never possessed."

Count Harcourt recoiled a step, and his features darkened with anger. How dared she insult him in the presence of a third person?

But before he could speak, Lola continued:

"This cuff link was found in Joan's room this morning. It belongs to you, doesn't it?"

He stared at the small gold link. It was his. Denial was useless and he knew it.

"Yes, it is mine," he admitted. "And I can explain how it came to be found in Mademoiselle Joan's room. Yesterday afternoon while you and Armand were away, she sent for me. I——"

"Joan sent for you to come to her boudoir?" his wife interrupted, giving him a swift, incredulous look.

"I can't believe it."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"It is true nevertheless," the scoundrel insisted, then finished a monstrous lie: "Mademoiselle Joan seemed very much worried when I came into her room. She wanted my advice about her coming marriage with Armand. She said she felt she ought to take back her promise of becoming his wife.

"She gave a number of reasons, the chief one being that she feared she would not be able to make him happy because of her unknown past. She admitted with amazing frankness that her love for him had cooled.

"I tried to reason with her, but she would not listen. She hinted that she would leave this house before morning. And she made good. That is all I can tell you. I have given you the facts as they are. More than that I can not do."

Armand Duverne had been a silent listener to the exchange of words between his sister and her husband.

Court Harcourt's story was too flimsy. Stepping up to him, his hands clenched, he shouted:

"You are a miserable liar. Joan never left this house of her own volition. She left because you——"

"Be careful!" warned the Governor of Algeria in a low, menacing growl. "This is the second time this epithet has been applied to me. I may excuse my wife, but no living man ever used that word without paying dearly for it. I ask you to take it back!"

"I'll take nothing back!" the younger man exclaimed defiantly.

"Then, by God, you'll take the consequences," the count snarled. Turning to Lola he added: "I shall expect you to support me in this quarrel, my dear wife. Your brother must leave my house."

Lola gave him an icy stare.

"In this matter I am with my brother, heart and soul," she declared. "Furthermore I wish to inform you that I am through with you, Count Felix Harcourt. I have suffered enough on your account. This filthy trick you played on Armand and Joan, is the last straw. It is my intention to make immediate application for an absolute divorce."

Count Harcourt uttered an extremely unpleasant laugh.

"A divorce, eh?" he sneered. "Do you think you have a chance to get it? Don't forget that I am in supreme command here in Algeria. For one thing I shall never agree to a separation by law."

"Whether you agree or not, can make little difference," she retorted. "My path lies straight ahead. I'll leave you this very day."

"You will not leave this house without my permission!" he cried, trembling with rage.

"Oh, yes she will," Armand Duverne broke in as he stepped up to his brother-in-law. "And you won't stop her. Lola goes with me. She would never have married you had she listened to me. But now that she, too, knows you for what you are — a man utterly without honor and a scoundrel, I'll back her up to the limit."

The count's face was livid with wrath.

"You'll answer to me for that insult, sir!" he almost screamed. "Only a duel to the death can wipe it out. I'll make the necessary arrangements and send my second to you!"

Without another glance at his wife he strode from the room, slamming the door behind him.

Lola rushed up to her brother and wound her arms about his neck. The worst thing possible had happened. Count Felix Harcourt was a crack shot and also the most skillful fencer. What chance had Armand with

him?

"Oh, he will kill you, brother," she sobbed. "And then what will become of me? You must avoid that duel."

"I am not a coward, Lola," he answered, patting her shaking shoulder. "If Count Harcourt sends his second to me, I shall accept the challenge. Nothing could suit me better than a chance to put a bullet through that beast. But we must not wast time now discussing that. We must find Joan."

"Yes, you are right," she said, quickly regaining her composure. "There is no time to be lost."

Armand looked pale but determined. His duel with the count had become a secondary consideration. Not until Joan was found would he give that matter another thought.

Chapter 67

THE WHIPPING POST

IN OFFICIAL and social circles the gossips were busy. It was no longer a secret that Count Felix Harcourt, the Governor of Algeria and his pretty wife, had separated and that a divorce would be the logical outcome. The fact that Armand Duverne and Lola had taken quarters at a hotel seemed to bear out the statement. But whether or not a divorce would be granted was still in doubt.

Rumors flew thick and fast. Some of them were based on facts, others resulted from over-active imaginations.

The officers of the army post were expectant. For within a short time they would have an opportunity to witness a duel between their commander-in-chief, and Armand Duverne.

However, owing to Armand's sudden illness, due to a nervous disorder, the duel had to be postponed indefinitely.

Count Harcourt showed his contempt for conventionalities and the opinion of his friends by doing an amazing thing. He appeared in public quite frequently accompanied by Mignon Faraget.

While it was not generally known that this beautiful young French woman had come to Tunis as a prisoner, most of the Governor's society cronies had their suspicion about the girl's character and standing.

She had no visible means of support, although

living in a handsome home. That she received many visits from Count Harcourt was a matter of common knowledge.

There were those who declared that he appeared in public with the girl to spite his wife.

This may have been true. On the face of it, however, it must seem like an ill-advised procedure. For it was sure to give his wife another proof of his infidelity and an added reason for wanting an absolute divorce.

One thing was sure. Count Harcourt and Mignon Faraget were on terms of closest intimacy. When she appeared with him, expensively gowned, she called him by his first name, and he used terms of endearment when addressing her.

Several times Mignon had voiced the desire to visit the prison buildings situated on the outskirts of the city.

Count Harcourt had put her off. The girl persisted and finally her persuasion brought about the desired result. Her lover promised to take her, naming the day.

Colonel Gautier, in charge of the prisoners, had inaugurated the system of putting them in the way of earning their keep.

The men were forced to work repairing streets, while the women were kept busy in the various manufacturing shops.

He always dealt kindly with deserving prisoners, but he could be stern and relentless if the occasion demanded it.

In the center of the courtyard stood a heavy post, a mute testimony to primitive cruelty. It was the whipping post, also an invention of Colonel Gautier.

The man who had to take twenty-five lashes across his bare back while fastened to this post, was not

likely to forget it.

It was used only in extreme cases, however. And then the victim received his punishment with all the other prisoners looking on.

While this served as a warning, it also aroused resentfulness and often hatred. For the average onlooker did not enjoy seeing one of his fellow unfortunates flogged until the blood ran.

Among a number of recently arrived prisoners was an elderly man by the name of Manet.

Obviously this man had seen better days in his youth. Why he was brought to Algeria to serve his sentence no one knew but the officials. And they remained silent.

Manet, at the very beginning of his term of imprisonment, showed open disdain for those above him. He aroused Colonel Gautier's wrath several times by refusing to obey orders.

His vitriolic denouncement of the French government stamped him as a Bolshevik.

To make matters worse for himself, he insistently sought to create dissatisfactions. The gospel he preached was suited to arouse the spirit of rebellion.

One day Colonel Gautier sent for him.

"Manet," he said to the sullen prisoner, "I have heard some ugly things about you. Take my advice and cut it out. You talk too much."

"I have a right to talk," Manet returned, his deep-set eyes flashing defiance.

"So you have," the other agreed, keeping his temper. "I have given every guard instructions to permit you fellows to talk while at work. There is no objection to that. But I do object to your constant preaching of rebellion. You have been——"

"Who heard me?" he man interrupted fiercely.

"I am not going to tell you that," Colonel Gautier answered, still in an apparent amiable mood. "Last night when you men were permitted to loiter about the prison corridor, you were heard to say that you would take the lead in bringing about an open revolt.

"You went farther than that. You suggested the killing of——"

"That's a lie—a damned lie!" Manet again interrupted. "I did nothing of the kind. Bring me the guard who told you that!"

"I could do that, but I won't," came back in a slightly raised tone. "Now let me tell you something, Manet. I don't like your conduct. I don't like your attitude right now. And unless you change that, I'll have you put in solitary confinement for a week on bread and water."

"Do it and be damned!" growled the prisoner.

Colonel Gautier struck a bell. Two husky guards entered the room.

"Put this man in a cell by himself for a week," he ordered. "During that time he must not be permitted to speak to anyone. His food shall consist of bread and water. Nothing else, understand?"

"Yes, Colonel," was the reply in unison.

"Alright. Take him away."

Manet accompanied the two guards meekly enough. But the moment they reached the corridor, he lashed out with his fist and knocked one of them down. The other narrowly escaped the same fate.

The noise of the fight, the cries and furious epithets brought the commander of the prison upon the scene.

Colonel Gautier did more than his share to subdue Manet. But for his pains he received a nasty cut over his right eye. This aroused his anger as it had

never been aroused before.

He had the cut treated and returned to his private office to ponder over the matter.

"That man must be taught a severe lesson," was his conclusion. "I let him go entirely too far. I don't know of anything that might break his spirit except the whipping post. And the whipping post it shall be."

Accordingly he made the usual arrangements. The flogging was to take place the following noon, in the presence of all the other prisoners.

Long before the arrival of that hour, it had become noised about that Manet would be whipped. Unpleasant news travels fast even in a prison.

It was shortly before twelve that all the convicts were herded in the courtyard. The men were drawn up in lines, forming a semi-circle. The women, less in number, stood in an awed group.

Colonel Gautier addressed them, and in a few well chosen words told of what was about to take place.

"I don't like this thing at all," he added. "For it is brutal. But the man to be thus punished has become a menace. Let those of you, who harbor the spirit of rebellion, take heed."

Then Manet was brought out. He was far from the man who so brazenly defied Colonel Gautier the day before.

His head was bowed and his shoulders were stooped. His entire appearance was pitiful. His sunken eyes roved wildly about, as if imploring help from those staring at him.

A number of guards stood with rifles ready for action. At the least sign of trouble they were told to shoot — and shoot to kill.

The prisoners, sensing the danger, behaved in an orderly manner. A whispered word passed here or

there, but not a man moved or showed the least inclination to take up Manet's cause.

While the latter's back was bared, two unexpected visitors walked into the courtyard. They were Count Felix Harcourt and Mignon Faraget.

"Ah, we are just in time to see a little excitement," the Governor said to his fair companion. "They are getting one of the prisoners ready for the whipping post."

Colonel Gautier, upon seeing his chief, saluted stiffly. He gave Mignon an icy stare. She grinned impudently.

"How interesting," she said unfeelingly. "I never saw a man whipped at the post before."

"Well, you'll see it now, my dear."

Count Harcourt linked his arm through that of the girl and drew her over to a position from where they could watch the horrible proceedings undisturbed.

Manet, trembling in every limb, was being fastened to the post. Several times he turned his head, like a child pleading for mercy.

But there was not the least mercy in the hard eyes of the big, hulking guard about to apply the "cat o' nine tails."

What made it seem all the more brutal was Manet's frail physique.

His spinal column stood out like a string of large beads. There was little flesh on his ribs and the bare arms were like thin limbs of a tree.

Among the prisoners in the first line was a tall and unusually handsome young man. Unlike the others he bore himself with a certain degree of dignity.

Mignon Faraget's admiring eyes rested upon him every now and then.

But the man was evidently too engrossed in the

whipping of Manet to notice the girl. The expression of his rather pale face was one of disgust mingled with sympathy.

As the executioner raised the whip and let it fall with a sickening slash, Manet howled with pain.

That same instant the young man from the front line sprang forward.

"In the name of humanity I protest against this treatment," he cried, addressing Colonel Gautier. "If you continue I shall appeal to the American Consul of Tunis."

"Who are you?" demanded the colonel angrily.

"My name is Donald Whitney," came back. "I am an American, sir!"

Colonel Gautier looked at the speaker sharply, then motioned to the executioner to desist.

"Whitney," he said, facing the latter, "I am an admirer of your country and its people. I am sorry that you find yourself in your present position. As a convict such as ou are, I can not grant what you ask.

"This man," indicating Manet, "richly deserves the punishment about to be inflicted upon him. He is not only a most dangerous character, but also a constant disturber of our prison morale. Proceed." This to the executioner.

Another frightful slash of the cat o'nine tails. This time Manet quivered from head to foot. His shrieks and plea for mercy were enough to soften a heart of stone.

"My God!" Donald Whitney appealed once more to Colonel Gautier, "I can not stand this. You must not let it go on. The poor man's body has wasted away to almost a skeleton. It is worse than cruel to whip him. It is inhuman and a crime."

It was apparent, however, that the commander of

the prison did not feel disposed to listen.

Before the big brute with the whip could strike another blow, Donald Whitney had him by the arm. And he did not stop with that.

A well directed smash of his right fist caught the executioner flush on the jaw and he staggered backward.

"Damn you!" the young American snarled, fit for anything now, "if you must whip someone, whip me. At least I can stand it."

As a rule Colonel Gautier would instantly have punished such an interference promptly and in no uncertain manner. But in this case his nerve must have failed him.

Perhaps he took no action because of his admiration for the bold and, nevertheless, brave offender.

If he admired Donald Whitney's utter fearlessness and handsome physique, he was not the only one. Something like mute adoration was expressed in Mignon Faraget's eyes.

"You made a suggestion which finds favor with me," Colonel Gautier said to the young American. "You seem to feel inclined to suffer in Manet's stead. Well, you shall have your wish. Take his place at the post and receive the remaining twenty-two blows of the whip."

Donald Whitney made a tragic figure as he stood there, taking off his blue jacket. He waited quietly until Manet had been released.

"I am ready," he declared.

"You are not ready," Colonel Gautier disagreed. "It is not enough that you remove your prison jacket. Your back must be bared."

At his motion two of the guards rushed forward and fairly tore Donald's shirt off.

Continued in next number

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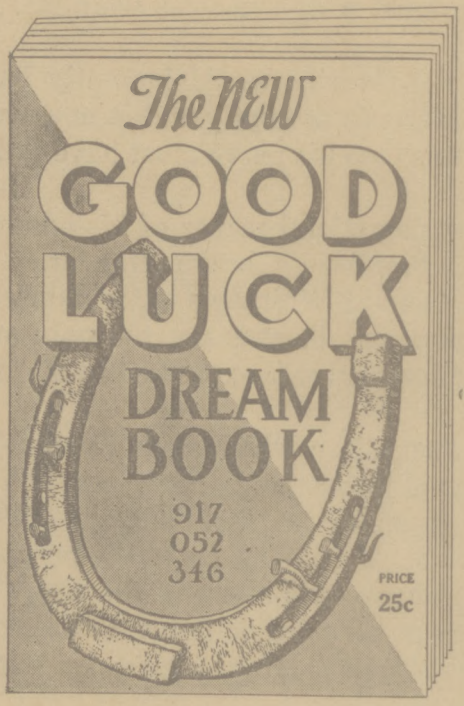

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